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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 CAIRO 007997

FOR S/CT, NEA/ENA, NEA/P; NSC FOR RIEDEL

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TAGS: [KISL](#) [PTER](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [EG](#)
SUBJECT: EGYPT: NEW TERRORIST GROUP, AL-WA'AD (THE PROMISE)
FACES MILITARY TRIBUNAL

CLASSIFIED BY ECONOMIC/POLITICAL MINISTER-COUNSELOR GENE A.
CRETZ FOR REASONS 1.5 (B) AND (D).

SUMMARY

11. (C) IN THE FIRST TWO WEEKS OF TRIAL BEFORE THE MILITARY TRIBUNAL, THE PREVIOUSLY UNKNOWN ORGANIZATION OF 94 EGYPTIANS AND FOREIGNERS, WHICH HAS BECOME KNOWN AS "AL-WA'AD" (THE PROMISE), IS ALLEGED TO BE A SOPHISTICATED NETWORK OF TERRORIST CELLS. INDICTMENTS WERE ISSUED AGAINST 94 DEFENDANTS, INCLUDING 7 FUGITIVES, ACCUSED OF FORMING A CLANDESTINE ILLEGAL ORGANIZATION WITH THE PURPOSE OF IMPEDING THE CONSTITUTION AND EGYPTIAN LAW, INFRINGING ON PERSONAL FREEDOM AND PUBLIC RIGHTS AND DAMAGING NATIONAL UNITY AND SOCIAL PEACE. A NUMBER OF MEMBERS WERE ALLEGEDLY PLANNING TO COMMIT TERRORIST ACTS, INCLUDING ASSASSINATION OF PUBLIC AND GOVERNMENT FIGURES. THEY COLLECTED FUNDS, THE GOVERNMENT CLAIMS, UPWARDS OF \$1,000,000 IN THE PAST TWO YEARS. WHILE THE GROUP CLAIMS IT WAS NOT PLANNING INTERNAL OPERATIONS IN EGYPT, IT ADMITTED SUPPORTING PALESTINIAN AND CHECHEN FIGHTERS. AL-WA'AD IS SAID TO BE HEADED BY TWO RELIGIOUS FIGURES AND A COMPUTER ENGINEER. ACCORDING TO THE PROSECUTION, ITS GOAL WAS TO UNDERMINE THE STATE AND TO ASSASSINATE POLITICAL, RELIGIOUS AND SECULAR FIGURES, INCLUDING PRESIDENT MUBARAK AND THE SHEIKH OF AL-AZHAR. IN REALITY, LITTLE HAS COME TO LIGHT ABOUT THE TRUE ASPIRATIONS OF THE GROUP, WHICH ADMITTEDLY COLLECTED LARGE SUMS OF MONEY, WHICH IT CLAIMS WAS BEING SENT TO CHECHEN REBELS AND PALESTINIANS (HAMMAS). THE TRIAL CONTINUES AT A RAPID PACE AS WE APPROACH THE LONG EID AL-FITR HOLIDAY BUT IS NOT LIKELY TO CONCLUDE FOR ANOTHER FEW WEEKS. END SUMMARY

REINVIGORATING THE MILITARY COURTS SYSTEM

12. (C) FOR THE FIRST TIME IN 2 YEARS, CIVILIAN DEFENDANTS WERE REFERRED TO EGYPT'S MILITARY COURTS SYSTEM FOR TRIAL. THE TRIAL OF THE FIRST OF THREE CIVILIAN GROUPS IN THE MILITARY TRIBUNAL AT HUCKSTEP, OUTSIDE CAIRO, BEGAN ON NOVEMBER 18. SOME OF THE DEFENDANTS STAND ACCUSED OF TERRORIST-RELATED CRIMES. INDICTMENTS WERE ISSUED AGAINST 94 DEFENDANTS, INCLUDING 7 FUGITIVES, ACCUSED OF FORMING A CLANDESTINE ILLEGAL ORGANIZATION WITH THE PURPOSE OF IMPEDING THE CONSTITUTION AND EGYPTIAN LAW, INFRINGING ON PERSONAL FREEDOM AND PUBLIC RIGHTS AND DAMAGING NATIONAL UNITY AND SOCIAL PEACE. A NUMBER OF MEMBERS WERE ALLEGEDLY PLANNING TO COMMIT TERRORIST ACTS, INCLUDING ASSASSINATION OF PUBLIC AND GOVERNMENT FIGURES, MUSLIMS AND CHRISTIANS, EGYPTIANS AND AMERICANS. THEY COLLECTED FUNDS, THE GOVERNMENT CLAIMS, UPWARDS OF \$1,000,000 IN THE PAST TWO YEARS, TO SUPPORT THE PALESTINIAN INTIFADA AND CHECHEN REBELS. WHILE AL-WA'AD CLAIMS IT WAS NOT PLANNING INTERNAL OPERATIONS IN EGYPT, IT ADMITTED SUPPORTING PALESTINIAN AND CHECHEN FIGHTERS.

LEADERS AND MEMBERS OF AL-WA'AD

13. (C) FORMED IN 1996, AL-WA'AD'S OPERATIONS WERE CLANDESTINE, ACCORDING TO THE PROSECUTION. THE

INVESTIGATION, ONGOING SINCE MAY 2001, REVEALED A NETWORK HEADED BY TWO POPULAR PRAYER LEADERS, SHEIKH FAWZY AL-SAYEED, 57, FROM AL-TAWHEED MOSQUE IN DOWNTOWN CAIRO AND NASHAT IBRAHIM, 46, THE ORATOR OF THE KABUL MOSQUE IN THE SUBURB OF NASR CITY. (NOTE: NASHAT WAS ARRESTED IN 1981, IN CONNECTION WITH THE SADAT ASSASSINATION, SPENT A YEAR IN PRISON, AFTER WHICH HE TRAVELED TO SAUDI ARABIA BEFORE RETURNING TO FOUND AL-WA'AD.) WHILE NASHAT CLAIMED THAT AL-WA'AD WAS OPPOSED TO TERRORISM AND VIOLENCE, THE PROSECUTION ALLEGED THEY WERE PLANNING INTERNAL SUBVERSION AND VIOLENCE. IN ADDITION TO THE FORMAL CHARGES, AL-SAYEED HAS BEEN ACCUSED OF ISSUING A FATWA (RELIGIOUS OPINION) CLAIMING THE EGYPTIAN PRESIDENT IS AN INFIDEL WHO DOES NOT IMPLEMENT SHARIA (ISLAMIC LAW) RULINGS.

14. (C) AL-WA'AD MEMBERS INCLUDED EGYPTIANS AND FOREIGNERS, AMONG THEM DUAL NATIONALS FROM THE U.S. (MUHAMMAD HISHAM SAYF AL-DIN YOUSSEF), HOLLAND (HISHAM MAHMOUD DIYAB), AUSTRIA (MUHAMMAD RABBAAH SALIM) AND GERMANY (MUHAMMAD HASAN AL-WARDANI). A PRINCIPAL DEFENDANT AND ALLEGED LEADER OF THE AL-WA'AD ORGANIZATION, MAGDI IDRIS, 33 YEARS OLD, IS A COMPUTER ENGINEER WHO OWNS A SPORTS GYM, ALLEGEDLY A SITE FOR TRAINING MILITANTS. HE REPORTEDLY RECRUITED MEMBERS ABROAD TO CONDUCT MILITARY AND EXPLOSIVES TRAINING IN EGYPT. AN AL-WA'AD MEMBER, A DAGESTANI BOMB EXPERT, WAS FOUND IN POSSESSION OF NUMEROUS EXPLOSIVE DEVICES. TWELVE EGYPTIAN SUSPECTS WERE CHARGED WITH RECEIVING MILITARY TRAINING OUTSIDE EGYPT, WITHOUT GOVERNMENT PERMISSION. TWO OR THREE SEVERAL DEFENDANTS, ACCORDING TO STATE SECURITY PROSECUTION, WERE TRAINED IN AFGHANISTAN. OTHER DEFENDANTS INCLUDED BUSINESSMEN, COMPUTER EXPERTS AND PILOTS. THE GOVERNMENT CLAIMS THAT THE GROUP ADVOCATED A VIOLENT IDEOLOGY, SIMILAR TO EGYPTIAN ISLAMIC JIHAD, INTENDING TO ATTACK PRESIDENT MUBARAK, GOVERNMENT AND AMERICAN OFFICIALS, POPULAR SECULAR FIGURES AND THE MODERATE SHEIKH OF AL-AZHAR. NASSERITE WEEKLY AL-ARABY REPORTED (11/1/01) THAT ACCORDING TO SHEIKH FAWZY AL-SAYEED, THE NAMES OF SIX INITIAL DEFENDANTS, SONS OF FORMER AND PRESENT SENIOR GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS, WERE DROPPED FROM THE FORMAL INDICTMENT.

OPENING SESSION: THE PLOT REVEALED

15. (C) AT THE OPENING SESSION (11/18), THE COURT HEARD REQUESTS FROM DEFENSE ATTORNEYS, WHO FAILED TO FORM A DEFENSE PANEL, LED BY ONE LAWYER. MANY ATTORNEYS FOR THE DEFENSE STRESSED THAT THEY WANTED TO PROCEED INDEPENDENTLY TO DEFEND ONLY THEIR RESPECTIVE CLIENTS. AT THE NEXT HEARING ON NOVEMBER 21, THE GOVERNMENT INTRODUCED WEAPONS, INCLUDING A BASEBALL BAT AND AIR RIFLE, WHICH WERE RULED INADMISSIBLE BY THE JUDGES. THE PROSECUTION SAID THAT MAJOR OPERATIONS WERE TO INCLUDE ATTACKING MOTORCADES OF SENIOR OFFICIALS; ATTACKS AGAINST THE SHEIKH OF AL-AZHAR, THE RADIO AND TV BUILDING, AN UNDISCLOSED LOCATION HOUSING AMERICAN PILOTS AND ATTACKS AGAINST BOTH MUSLIM AND CHRISTIAN PERSONALITIES. THE PROSECUTOR CHARGED THAT AL-WA'AD RECENTLY COLLECTED \$600,000, WHICH WAS SENT TO A JORDANIAN RESIDENT IN THE UAE (MOHAMED ALI, AKA ABU-HAMZAH), WHO RUNS THE AL-HARAMAYN CHARITY FOUNDATION IN SAUDI ARABIA. THROUGH THE UAE CONNECTIONS, THEY FUNNELED MONEY TO THE CHECHEN RESISTANCE, ACCORDING TO THE PROSECUTION. AL-WA'AD SOUGHT TO INDOCTRINATE YOUNG EGYPTIANS, TO RECRUIT THEM TO FIGHT IN CHECHENYA AND THE BALKANS. ONCE THEY DEVELOPED EXPERTISE, THE GOVERNMENT CLAIMS, THEY WOULD RETURN TO EGYPT TO CARRY OUT TERRORIST OPERATIONS. AL-AHRAM AL-ARABY NEWSPAPER CLAIMED THE GROUP HAD CLOSE RELATIONS WITH HAMMAS AND ON 12/2 REPORTED A MEETING BETWEEN A HAMMAS OFFICIAL AND DEFENDANT NASHAT AT WHICH HE RECEIVED A LIST OF REQUESTED MATERIEL, INCLUDING MACHINE GUNS AND ANTI-TANK ARTILLERY.

THE PLOT THICKENS

16. (C) AS THE GOVERNMENT BUILT ITS CASE AGAINST AL-WA'AD MEMBERS, IT REVEALED THAT THE ORGANIZATION WAS DIVIDED INTO CLUSTER CELLS. MEMBERS CAME FROM THE ELITES AND EDUCATED

CLASSES. FUNDS WERE COLLECTED FROM WORSHIPPERS AT TWO LARGE MOSQUES AS WELL AS DONATIONS FROM BUSINESSMEN THEY RECRUITED.

NASHAT IBRAHIM REPORTEDLY PAID EXPENSES FOR MEMBERS TO RECEIVE TRAINING AT CHECHEN RESISTANCE CAMPS, IN KASHMIR AND AFGHANISTAN. A DAGASTANI EXPLOSIVES EXPERT, REGISTERED IN THE MEDICAL FACULTY AT AL-AZHAR TRAINED MEMBERS IN CAIRO AND ALEXANDRIA TO PLANT CAR BOMBS AND OTHER DEVICES. TWO DEFENDANTS ALLEGEDLY CONFESSED TO BELONGING TO THE GAMA'AT ISLAMIYYA SINCE THE MID-1990'S. THREE OF THE DEFENDANTS ALLEGEDLY RECEIVED CIVIL AVIATION TRAINING IN THE U.S.: MUHAMMAD HISHAM SAYF AL-DIN, HUSAM ZAKARIYA ABDUL SALAM, AND MUHAMMAD MAHMUD NUR-AL-DIN.

¶7. (C) IN ITS THIRD SESSION ON DECEMBER 3, AT WHICH THE MILITARY TRIBUNAL HEARD TESTIMONY FROM THE INVESTIGATING OFFICER, WHO SAID THE GROUP HAD BEEN STUDYING THE MOVEMENT OF THE PRESIDENT'S MOTORCADE, PREPARING TO BLOW IT UP. DEFENSE ATTORNEYS REQUESTED THE PRESENCE OF THE MUFTI OF THE REPUBLIC, PRESIDENT OF AL-AZHAR UNIVERSITY, AND DEAN OF THE RELIGION FACULTY AS WITNESSES FOR THE DEFENSE. DEFENSE ATTORNEYS CLAIMED THE COPY OF THE CASE WAS ILLEGIBLE AND REQUESTED THE HEARING BE HALTED UNTIL A CLEAR COPY COULD BE OBTAINED. THE PRESIDENT OF THE COURT DECIDED TO GIVE LAWYERS ACCESS TO THE ORIGINAL OF THE CASE DOCUMENTS WHILE CONTINUING THE CASE. THE ATTORNEY FOR EGYPTIAN-AMERICAN MUHAMMAD HISHAM SAYF AL-DIN REQUESTED A MEDICAL EXAMINATION FOR EVIDENCE OF TORTURE. OTHERS ASKED TO BE HOSPITALIZED FOR DETERIORATING HEALTH CONDITIONS. THE COURT ACCEPTED THE DEFENSE APPEALS AND AGREED TO REQUEST AN AL-AZHAR COMMITTEE EXAMINE BOOKS FOUND IN THE POSSESSION OF THE ACCUSED TO JUDGE THEIR CONFORMITY WITH ISLAMIC LEGISLATION.

¶8. (C) CROSS EXAMINATION OF PROSECUTION WITNESSES BY DEFENSE ATTORNEYS TOOK UP THE NEXT TWO (DECEMBER 4 AND 6) SESSIONS. DURING THESE SESSIONS A LINK BETWEEN JORDANIAN ABU HAMZA AND DEFENDANT MAGDI IDRIS BECAME CLEAR. THE FORMER SERVED AS THE LINK BETWEEN AL-WA'AD CELLS AND TRAINING CAMPS ABROAD, MAKING ARRANGEMENTS FOR THEIR MOVEMENTS. DEFENSE ATTORNEYS CHARGED THAT THEIR DEFENDANTS WERE TORTURED AND THEIR CONFESSIONS, MADE UNDER DURESS, WERE INVALID. ACCORDING TO GOVERNMENT DAILY, AL-AHRAM (12/6) THE PROSECUTION INTRODUCED ONLY 21 PIECES OF EVIDENCE, SPECIFICALLY RELIGIOUS BOOKS AND DRAWINGS FOR TARGET PRACTICE, WHILE THE INDICTMENT INDICATES 150 PIECES OF EVIDENCE, INCLUDING WEAPONS.

SKEPTICS VIEW THE CASE

¶9. (C) THE REFERRAL OF THIS CASE TO A MILITARY TRIBUNAL HAS RAISED SUSPICIONS AND SOME CONCERNS IN EGYPT. THE ABSENCE OF CONCRETE EVIDENCE AND CREDIBLE WEAPONS FURTHER WEAKENS THE GOVERNMENT'S CASE AND HEIGHTENS SUSPICIONS AS TO WHETHER THIS IS A SHOW TRIAL. SOME BELIEVE THAT INTRODUCING THE CASE IN THE MILITARY TRIBUNAL WAS A POST-9/11 DEMONSTRATION OF EGYPT'S CONCRETE RESOLVE TO DEAL WITH TERRORISM. DEFENSE ATTORNEY HAFEZ ABU SAADA CLAIMED THAT THE CASE WOULD HAVE ENDED IN ACQUITTAL IN AN ORDINARY COURT OF LAW. THIS, HE SAID, IS LESS LIKELY TO HAPPEN IN A MILITARY PROCEEDING, WHERE THE JUDGES ARE MORE SUSCEPTIBLE TO GOVERNMENT PRESSURE.

¶10. (C) PROMINENT ARAB JOURNALIST MOHAMED SALAH BELIEVES THAT THE MEMBERS OF THIS GROUP DID INDEED VIOLATE THE LAW IN SOLICITING AND ACCEPTING DONATIONS WITHOUT PERMISSION FROM THE GOE, IN VIOLATION OF THE 1992 MILITARY ORDER TO THAT EFFECT. WHAT PROVIDED THIS GROUP A RADICAL ISLAMIC TINT WAS THE FACT THAT SOME OF THOSE INVOLVED HAD BEEN MEMBERS OF RADICAL ISLAMIST GROUPS IN THE PAST.

COMMENT

¶11. (C) WHILE WE AGREE THAT THE EVIDENCE IS SCANT AND THE MAKINGS OF A PUTSCH UNLIKELY SO FAR, THE GOVERNMENT IN OUR VIEW, WAS ALSO CONCERNED ABOUT THE GROUP'S POTENTIAL. THEY WERE ALREADY BREAKING THE LAW BY COLLECTING AND SENDING LARGE AMOUNTS OF CASH AND PROCURING WEAPONS TO BE SENT TO CHECHNYA

AND PALESTINIAN HAMMAS BOTH OF WHICH ARE EMOTIONAL AS WELL AS POLITICAL CONCERNS FOR MANY ARAB MUSLIMS. THE ABSENCE OF EVIDENCE IN THIS CASE MAY DEMONSTRATE THE DIFFICULTY OF TRACING FUNDS, PARTICULARLY CASH CONTRIBUTIONS, IN THE INTERNATIONAL ARENA. WHILE WE SEE NO CONNECTION BETWEEN THIS GROUP AND AL-QAEDA, WE CANNOT RULE OUT THAT IT WAS AN OFFSHOOT OF ANOTHER INTERNATIONAL GROUP. CERTAINLY, LOCAL TERRORIST ELEMENTS, OR CELLS, RECEIVING MILITARY AND EXPLOSIVES TRAINING ABROAD, COULD USE THAT EXPERTISE INTERNALLY, AS THE GOVERNMENT CLAIMS. PRESIDENT MUBARAK'S EFFORTS OVER THE PAST YEAR TO TURN THE FOCUS BACK TO PEACE AT THE SAME TIME THE ISRAELIS ARE PERCEIVED AS BEING AT WAR WITH THE PALESTINIANS, HAVE NOT MADE HIM MORE POPULAR. THAT IS PARTICULARLY TRUE AMONG THOSE WHO FEEL A NEED TO HELP DEFEND MUSLIMS AGAINST OCCUPATION FORCES, WHICH THEY VIEW AS "LEGITIMATE JIHAD".

WELCH